

June 16, 2009

Legislation to Authorize \$5 Million Annually to LANL, \$35 Million to Research Parks Nationally, Moves onto Full Committee

Washington, DC – Today, the Science and Technology Committee’s Subcommittee on Energy and Environment advanced Rep. Ben Ray Luján’s legislation to formally authorize existing National Environmental Research Parks (NERPs). The Subcommittee accepted amendments from Technology and Innovation Subcommittee Vice Chairman Luján and Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Chairwoman Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ). The legislation advanced through the subcommittee. It will now move onto the full Committee on Science and Technology.

“My amendment will support increased coordination between the National Environmental Research Parks and helps ensure that the Parks include students of all educational backgrounds in their educational outreach programs,” said Rep. Luján. “The amendment instructs the Secretary of Energy to designate a NERP Coordinator to help oversee complementary research activities and ensure that best practices information is shared among the Parks. The amendment also clarifies that the Office of Science will be the lead agency for supporting the parks within the Department. In my amendment, the importance of community colleges is also recognized by including them in the Park’s outreach to schools and students.”

The amendment offered by Chairwoman Giffords would encourage ecological researchers to use the Parks to study the environmental impacts of renewable energy sources, as well as traditional energy sources.

“Renewable energy technologies are generally considered to have low environmental impacts compared with traditional energy sources, but no energy technology is completely free of effects on surrounding ecosystems,” said Chairwoman Giffords. “As use of renewables is poised to grow significantly in the coming years, it is essential that we understand their environmental impacts so we can better mitigate them.”

Rep. Luján introduced the legislation, which promotes environmental science programs at Los Alamos National Laboratory by authorizing funding for its NERP as well as for six other NERPs throughout the country.

The research conducted at the NERPs produces valuable data that can be used to fight climate change and clean up contaminated sites. The NERPs have existed for decades and have enormous potential for studying the impact of climate change on the environment. With the new authorization and consistent funding, they can expand their research activities. Rep. Luján’s legislation authorizes \$5,000,000 for each NERP for each of the fiscal years 2010 through 2014.

“These parks are unique outdoor laboratories that offer secure settings for long-term research on a broad range of subjects, including wildlife biology, ecology, climate change effects, and maintenance of freshwater ecosystems,” Rep. Luján said when the legislation was introduced last week. “The parks also provide rich environments for training future researchers and introducing the public to environmental sciences.”

Last week, the Energy and Environment Subcommittee of the Committee on Science and Technology held a hearing that examined climate and environmental research programs conducted by the Department of Energy—which included discussion on Rep. Luján’s NERP bill. Dr. Nate McDowell of Los Alamos National Laboratory gave testimony at the hearing.

“I’m glad that we conducted a hearing to discuss Department of Energy’s environmental research along with the National Energy Research Park legislation I introduced last week,” said Rep. Luján after the hearing. “The witnesses provided excellent testimony that will help shape future efforts to address issues from climate change to contamination.”

Dr. Nate McDowell of Los Alamos National Laboratory talked about the advanced laser facility at the Los Alamos NERP which uses laser technology to observe and monitor carbon dioxide emissions. He discussed the importance of coordination between the NERPs and collaboration on their respective research projects. He also talked about how NERPs are not consistently funded and often do not have the necessary resources to utilize their full environmental research potential.

For more information about the Department of Energy's National Energy Research Parks, visit <http://www.nerp.rnl.gov/>

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For more information about the Los Alamos National Environmental Research Park, visit http://www.lanl.gov/orgs/tt/partnering/user_facility/facilities/envIRON_research.shtml

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